

COMOROS



1. OVERVIEW

Despite its status as one of the poorest and smallest countries in the world, and despite its coup-prone, turbulent history over the past few decades, the Comoros boasts a national ICT policy as an expression of its Government's commitment to promote improved ICT infrastructure as well as access and usage across the education system. There are however very few initiatives under way that promote the use of ICTs in Comoran schools and education institutions.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Comoros is the third smallest African nation by area, one of the smallest in the world, and with a population estimated at 798,000 it is also the sixth smallest African nation by population. It has however, one of the highest population densities in Africa. The Comoros Islands is considered a microstate - meaning that because of its small area size and population it is still a sovereign state¹.

Since independence from France in 1975, the country has had a troubled history marked by a series of coups and separatist struggles. By 2002, three of the major islands are considered as part of the Union of the Comoros, although each has considerable autonomy and the fourth island remains under the jurisdiction of France. Agriculture is the principal economic activity with crops grown both for domestic consumption and export. The major food crops are cassava, coconut, bananas, rice, sweet potatoes, pulses, and corn. Vanilla, ylang-ylang, cloves, and copra have been the major export crops. Historically the country was the world's leading producer of ylang-ylang oil widely used and the world's second-largest producer of vanilla. But with the decline in the price of these products, the value of these exports to the economy also dropped. There is a small tourist industry on the Islands which had been recently promoted by South African interests².

Comoros is one of the poorest countries in the world. The Comoros' real GDP growth was a low 1.9% in 2004 and real GDP per capita was continuing declining annually in 2004. The country also has an inadequate transportation system, a young and rapidly increasing population, and few natural resources. The low educational level of the labor force contributes to a subsistence level of economic activity, high unemployment, and a heavy dependence on foreign grants and technical assistance.

Table 1: Basic Economic Indicators, Comoros 2005³

Population (2005)	600.5 thousands
Languages	Official languages: Arabic and French. National language: Shikomoro.
2005 Economic activity (% of GDP)	Agriculture: 35.1; Industry: 10.1; Services: 54.8 .
Human Development Index	0.556(2004)
Per capita Gross National Income	2000: 400 USD; 2004: 560 USD; 2005: 640 USD

3. EDUCATION SYSTEM

All children attend Quranic school for 2 or 3 years, at age 5; where they learn the rudiments of the Islamic faith and some classical Arabic. When rural children attend these schools, they sometimes move away from home and help the teacher work their land. Quranic schools are free which is one reason why most parents send their children to attend.

France established a system of primary and secondary schools based on the French model, which remains largely in place. Comoran law requires all children to complete eight years of schooling between the ages of 7 and 15. The system provides 6 years of primary education, followed by 7 years of secondary schooling.

Comoros has no university but post-secondary education, which in 1993 involved 400 students, is available in the form of teacher training, agricultural education training, health sciences, and business. Those desiring higher education must study abroad; a "brain drain" has resulted because few university graduates are willing to return to the islands. Teacher training and other specialized courses are available at the M'Vouni School for Higher Education, in operation since 1981 at a site near Moroni. Few Comoran teachers study overseas, but the republic often

cannot give its teachers all the training they need. Some international aid has been provided, however, to further teacher training in the islands themselves. For example, in 1987 the IDA extended credits worth US\$7.9 million to train 3,000 primary and 350 secondary school teachers. In 1986 the government began opening technology training centers offering a three-year diploma program at the upper secondary level. The Ministry of National Education and Professional Training is responsible for education policy.

As elsewhere in Comoran society, political instability has taken a toll on the education system. Routinely announced reductions in force among the civil service, often made in response to international pressure for fiscal reform, sometimes result in teacher strikes. When civil service cutbacks result in canceled classes or examinations, students have at times taken to the streets in protest. Students have also protested, even violently, against government underfunding or general mismanagement of the schools--the World Bank stated in 1994 that the quality of education resulted in high rates of repetition and dropouts such that the average student needed fourteen years to complete the six-year primary cycle⁴.

The percentage of illiterate adults over the age of 15 in the nation decreased slightly from 52.1 percent in 1980 to 42.7 percent in 1995. During that time period, the percentage of illiterate adult males decreased from 44 percent to 35.8 percent, and the percentage of illiterate adult females decreased from 60 percent to 49.6 percent.

The Ministry of National Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports oversees the educational system of Comoros.

Table 2: Education Indicators, 2004⁵

Enrolment in Primary Education (% gross)	85(2004)
Enrolment in Secondary Education (% gross)	35(2004)
Transition to Secondary	67(2003)
Enrolment in tertiary Education (% gross)	2(2004)
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	0.88 in primary; 0.76 in secondary and 0.77 at university(2004)

It is evident from the table that the drop out rate is high and that few children attend secondary school in the Comoros. Despite this however, there has generally been an expansion in primary enrolment since the late seventies, partly attributable to the adoption of the Education For All program which also led to the suspension of school fees in the Moheli Island⁶

4. INFRASTRUCTURE

Table 3: ICT Infrastructure Indicators, 2005⁷

Fixed line subscribers (2004)	15 per 1000 persons
Mobile Subscribers (2004)	9 per 1000 persons
Dial-up subscribers (2004)	1.0 per 1000 persons
Broadband subscribers (2004)	-
Internet users (2004)	8.0 per 1000 persons
Television broadcast stations	NA

Radio stations (2001)	AM 1, FM 4.
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A law authorizing the liberalization of the telecom sector and the privatization of the Société nationale des postes et télécommunications (SNTP) or its daughter companies was approved by Parliament already in 1997. Economic reform in general and reform in the telecom sector has been a slow affair in Comoros due to the political crisis experienced the last decade⁸.

The SNPT however remains the sole provider of telecommunication and Internet services. SNPT has about 10 000 lines, mostly on the main island and capital Moroni, but also on two other islands, which are linked by analogue microwave along with Mayotte (the French protectorate). SNPT also operates the SITA network POP on behalf of the company⁹.

5. POLICY FRAMEWORK

Since 2003 the Comoran government has been involved in the development of an ICT policy¹⁰ and strategic plan with the support of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. The National ICT Policy adopted in 2004, commits the Government to develop a multi-disciplinary policy that takes into account 9 strategic axes and principles. These 9 principles are:

- Using ICT as a tool for human development and to reduce poverty
- Promoting good governance through ICT
- Facilitating the process of reconciliation and reconstitution of national unity in
- encouraging social and cultural interaction in the society;
- Taking into account regional differences
- Taking into account the gender aspect
- Adopting the regional vision on ICT
- Intensifying economic activities
- Building capacities for firms
- Promoting a new policy for cooperation and partnership

The Strategic Axes include among others, the building of human resources capacities which highlights the goal of connecting schools, universities, research bodies and libraries with ICTs and which recognises that ICT have the potential to promote and support collaboration among students, teachers and research entities and to reduce communication and administrative cost. Activities proposed to reach these goals include:

- Teacher training in ICTs and the use of computer in teaching.
- Awareness and training of education sector personnel on
- pedagogical applications of ICT;
- Introducing ICT in the education system
- Designing curricula and developing software;

The Policy also commits the Government to promote partnerships between within the public sector, with the private sector and schools in defining the pedagogical content and mechanisms of funding.

6. MAJOR INITIATIVES

There are a few initiatives under way within the Comoros. These include

The inclusion of the **University of the Comoros** in the recently established **Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)** program promoted by the Commonwealth of Learning. The VUSSC is a network committed to the collaborative development of free content resources for education¹¹. The University had 2600 students in 2005/6.

The **Centre national de documentation et de recherche scientifique (CNDRS)** is divided into seven divisions: Archives nationales, Bibliothèque nationale, Documentation nationale, Musée national, Recherche scientifique, Production et valorisation and Administration. CNDRS has a micro-computers and informatics training programme.

The **Division Documentation nationale** is responsible for the management of documentation on the Comoros and for co-ordinating the development of a national information system, external relations to CNDRS and the process of computerizing CNDRS' information.

The collections of CNDRS and the **Centre de documentation de la Direction générale du Plan** are both computerized.

The Bibliothèque nationale produces a bibliographic database on the Comoros called BABCOM which is based on CDS-ISIS¹².

6. ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS

The table below provides a brief overview of the current stage of development on ICTs in education in the Comoros.

Variables	Enabling	Constraining
Policy Framework & Implementation	Comoros has a national ICT policy which includes consideration for the provision of access to and use of ICTs in education.	
Advocacy Leadership	The National ICT policy is being promoted by the President	
Gender Equity re access to ICTs		No explicit mention of commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality with reference to ICT access and use nor are there dedicated projects and programs working in this area.
Infrastructure & Access		Comoros has a very poor and under-developed ICT infrastructure and very low levels of ICT access in education institutions
Collaborating mechanisms	The national ICT policy refers to the need for collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships.	
Human Resource Capacity		Comoros has extremely limited human resource capacity exacerbated by very high levels of

		illiteracy
Fiscal Resources		Comoros is is strongly dependent on external donor funding.
Learning content		Not much digital education content based on the local curriculum frameworks is available in Comoros education institutions.

KEY CONTACTS

END NOTES

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comoros>

² <http://www.ksu.edu/sasw/comoros/economy.comoro>

³ Human Development Report 2006. Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty and global water crisis:
<http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/>

⁴ <http://countrystudies.us/comoros/13.htm>

⁵ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49591&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁶ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/comoros_2674.html

⁷ World Telecommunications Development Report 2006, ITU.

<http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPPProfile.asp?CCODE=COM&PTYPE=CP>

⁸ Comoros telecom market speeds up reform Afrol News <http://www.afrol.com/articles/13780>

⁹ Balancing Act News Update http://www.balancingact-africa.com/country_profile.php?id=30

¹⁰ National ICT Policy:
<http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/Documents/LETTRE%20%20DE%20%20POLITIQUE%20%20%20NTIC%20COMORES.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.wikieducator.org/VUSSC>

¹² Balancing Act News http://www.balancingact-africa.com/country_profile.php?id=30